ALBUQUERQUE: THE COMMUNITY

Location and Climate. The city of Albuquerque is located in north central New Mexico. With an elevation ranging from 4,900 to 6,500 feet, the City nestles against the Sandia and Manzano Mountains on the east, is bisected north to south by the Rio Grande and spreads into the high desert on the west. The mountains, rising 5,000 feet above the City provide protection from harsh winter storms. Although winter snow is not uncommon, travel is rarely a problem. Albuquerque enjoys excellent weather year round, with four distinct seasons, but all four seasons contain a majority of sunny days. The climate is arid; the city averages only eight inches of precipitation a year.

History. The area's first permanent residents were Ancestral Puebloans who planted corn, beans and squash and constructed adobe and brick pit homes along the banks of the Rio Grande in the 6th century. They abandoned their pueblos around 1300 AD.

The Spanish arrived in the mid-16th century and opened a trading post in the last years of that century. In 1706, the present site of the city's Old Town, just north of today's downtown, was established and named after the Duke of Albuquerque, viceroy of New Spain. The city still bears the 'Duke City' nickname.

During much of the 18th and 19th century, Albuquerque was a trading center along the Camino Real linking Mexico City and Santa Fe. With the coming of the railroad in 1880, development around the railway station gave birth to what is now downtown Albuquerque. In the 20th century growth was fueled by Route 66, the mother road connecting Chicago to Los Angeles, which brought a steady stream of traffic through downtown. During and after WWII, a federal presence was established at Sandia National Laboratories and Kirkland AFB.

Tricentennial. In 2006 the Albuquerque will celebrate its' 300th birthday. A giant city-wide celebration will take place from April 2005 through October 2006. During this time public events and celebrations are planned including openings of many new and refurbished public facilities and monuments around the city. Area museums will house special exhibits showcasing the rich Native American, Spanish, Mexican and US history of the City. Foreign and national dignitaries will join in the celebration to reflect on Albuquerque's history and dream about our future. Albuquerque is only the 23rd U.S. city to claim a Tricentennial mark.

Government. In 1885, while New Mexico was still a territory of the United States, Albuquerque was chartered as a town, and in 1891, Albuquerque was organized under territorial laws as a city. The City Charter under which the City of Albuquerque government now operates was adopted in 1917. The purpose of the City Charter is to provide for maximum local self-government. The City Charter was amended in 1974 to move the city from a commission-manager to a mayor-council form of government. Voters elect a full-time mayor and nine part-time city councilors in non-partisan elections. The mayor and councilors serve four-year terms with council terms staggered every two years, providing continuity on the council. The mayor is limited to two consecutive terms of office. Albuquerque is a "home rule city" under the New Mexico Constitution. The City may exercise all legislative powers and perform all functions not expressly denied by general law or charter.

Statistics. The Albuquerque Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) in the 2000 census had a population of 712,738. Albuquerque, with 448,607 residents, is the largest city in New Mexico; accounting for approximately one-fourth of the state's population. It is the 35th largest city in the country in terms of population. Albuquerque is culturally diverse. About 49.9% of the residents are non-Hispanic white; 37.3% Hispanic; 3.3% Native American; 2.8% African American; 2.2% Asian American; and 4.5% other. The median household income from the census for the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) is $39,088. This is 93% of the U.S. average and compares favorably with other cities in the region. This cultural diversity is recognized, encouraged and celebrated throughout the City by special events, and particularly with Summerfest in the downtown area on Civic Plaza.

Architecture, street and subdivision names, art, and dozens of annual ethnic festivals attest to this rich cultural diversity. Sixty percent of city residents own their homes.

Economy. Located at the intersection of two major interstates, served by air and rail, Albuquerque is the major trade, commercial, and financial center of the state. Only 300 miles from the Mexican border, Albuquerque is well situated to benefit from the North American Free Trade Agreement. Trade and service are the largest economic sectors and provide over half the jobs in the Albuquerque area. Government provides close to 20% of non-agriculture employment and accounts for the largest employers in the MSA:

- University of New Mexico — 15,560
- Kirtland Air Force Base (Civilian) — 17,125
- Albuquerque Public Schools — 11,500
- Sandia National Labs — 7,800
- City of Albuquerque — 7,035
- Kirtland Air force Base (Military) — 6,750

Albuquerque is noted as the hot air balloon capital of the world, playing host to an annual balloon fiesta that draws entries from around the world. Over 750 hot air balloons color the sky for nine days each fall. The City hosts the New Mexico State Fair each September. In addition, the City operates a major convention center hosting a number of national events annually.

The City relies primarily on two types of taxes, gross receipts taxes and property taxes. The total gross receipts tax rate in Albuquerque is currently 6.75%, of which the City receives 2.5375%. This includes a limited ten-year life, quarter cent tax to address transportation issues and the permanent Public Safety Quarter Cent Gross Receipts Tax. The difference between the total tax and the City's share goes to state and county governments. The largest share of city property taxes is used to service bonds for capital improvements, with only a small percentage used for general operations.